



CTDC
Centre for Transnational
Development and Collaboration



Policy Brief No. 1: January 2017

Gender and the 'Refugee Crisis'

Prioritising Gendered Approaches to Refugee Protection in Turkey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief builds on the UN's 3RP (Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015-16 in Response to the Syria Crisis) by offering a complimentary analysis of the needs of both Syrian refugee women and LGBTQI individuals living in Turkey. Through research conducted by CTDC, it becomes plainly apparent that a number of needs are not being met, and that such an outcome has been made possible in part because of a lack of research funding on the one hand, and the limits of established humanitarian and state-level responses on the other. Nevertheless, this situation appears to offer a number of opportunities to improve responses to displacement in Turkey, especially when a gendered lens is adopted. This highlights under-observed challenges and solutions with regard to living conditions, employment, housing and integration, community relations, sexual violence and sex work. A focus on gender will also allow for more sustainable, long-term solutions to emerge that are inclusive in nature, generating an engagement with groups that remain marginalised by various gendered barriers to protection, including employment opportunities, societal attitudes, stigma and taboo.



“The challenges presented by the ‘Refugee Crisis’ are *not being effectively responded to*”

Key Challenges

Research

A number of challenges to protection exist that emerge both out of the complex political and geopolitical context of the Syrian Crisis, but also the approaches taken by funders, donors and Northern states. These are most clearly present with regard to research, which remains underfunded, allowing for a number of key misconceptions to form vis-à-vis the situation in Turkey. These largely offer surface-level assessments that focus on Turkey’s protection guarantees, whilst overlooking the highly complex, protracted nature of the challenges, stigmas, and changes that are operating at the societal level. In fact, the political and social situation in Turkey is rapidly developing, making a number of key assumptions both premature and out-dated, hence the need for more responsive investigations into refugee livelihoods.

Living Conditions

Another challenge exists with regard to the distribution of key refugee populations, who are overwhelm-

ingly residing in urban centres such as Gaziantep, Mersin, Izmir and Istanbul. This has made it far more difficult to deliver aid and protection to refugees, who are often confronted with poorer living conditions, poverty, work/sexual exploitation, isolation and a lack of opportunities. These are often enhanced by gendered factors, especially sexual exploitation and employment opportunities.

Routes to Protection

Both Turkey and the EU have also made it more difficult to secure adequate protection, particularly with regard to legal and political rights. Turkey no longer issues Syrians with visas, and the EU-Turkey deal has worked to limit routes to Europe. This has meant a number of refugee responsibilities have been externalised in such a way that deliberately limits refugee mobility, keeping refugees in their ‘region of origin’. This is placing many refugees in more protracted and precarious situations, with consequences that must be fully investigated, particularly with regard to gender, and its consequences on integration, access

to employment, education, sexual and reproductive services, livelihoods and – crucially – legal status.

Language Barriers

Given the more protracted nature facing refugees living in Turkey, language barriers are presenting themselves as a major challenge. In many instances, a Turkish-Arabic language barrier confronts support groups, CBOs and the Turkish state on the one hand, and refugees from Syria on the other, from fully engaging with one another. This arguably limits effective protection, with long-term consequences on refugee livelihoods, societal participation and integration. Certain taboos relating to gender roles are no doubt exacerbating these problems, making it more difficult for refugee women to secure important language skills, for example.

Child Refugees

A number of these challenges are highly pertinent when it comes to the situation faced by child refugees. They often encounter heightened risk to work and sexual exploitation, with



little to no legal protection. The situation confronting children is also indicative of the situation facing parents and families, whose needs can be more fully appreciated through the use of a gendered lens.

Sexual Minorities

The needs of sexual minority refugees and asylum seekers have frequently gone un-met in Turkey. This is a consequence of Turkey's increasing opposition to LGBTQI rights, on the one hand, and the limited support services available to sexual minority refugees on the other. Whilst a number of key rights groups have reached out to LGBTQI refugees, this environment, and the 'double marginality' that many face as a result of their being both refugees and a sexual minority, discourages sexual minority refugees from seeking protection. Numerous reports focus on harassment by police and the local community for example. Moreover, Turkey's asylum dispersal policy means many sexual minority refugees are placed in designated 'satellite towns', often immobilising them in largely conservative areas, putting them at heightened risk of further persecution.

Radicalism

The lack of opportunities confronting refugees, as well as the marginalisation many face, makes a number of groups more vulnerable to the violence of radicalism. In many instances, CTDC's research identified how radicalism was often imposed in largely gendered ways, taking advantage of poverty, particularly among women and children, who may encounter forced marriages, sexual abuse, and violence.

Breaking Gender Binaries

CTDC's research found that the existence of 'normalised' gender roles, both among women, as well as children and sexual minorities, were prevalent, yet often did not reflect reality. Many women were often defying their normative gender roles in response to the Syrian Crisis, in a way that should be meaningfully engaged with on the part of practitioners and the state. The ways in which gender is influencing the lives, opportunities, and identities of refugees is thus a largely overlooked, yet incredibly important, issue that may open up opportunities for the promotion of lasting and transformative protection. However,

transformative protection. However, understanding the ways in which gender roles are developing within the protracted context of the Syrian Crisis requires further research.

Concluding Statement of Issue

Years into the Syrian crisis, the refugee situation is still being treated as temporary in Turkey. No efforts have been made to integrate the refugees into Turkish society and instead further restrictions are being imposed on Syrians in the country. Despite the heavy toll the Syrian Crisis has had on all refugees, the challenges facing women, young girls and sexual minorities are particular and multiplied due to their gender and sexual identities. The urgency to address refugees' needs in more sustainable ways to create livelihoods for refugees in Turkey has become apparent, especially that those groups are vulnerable to manipulation, exploitation and political mobilisation by various extremist groups.

In this way, CTDC's conversations with refugees in Turkey identifies a way forward. There was a general willingness to discuss 'taboo' topics such as gender and sexuality, topics that proved to be highly effective in illuminating the various needs and challenges facing the entire refugee community in Turkey. It seems apparent that such discussions also have the capacity to be inclusive, safe, productive and sustainable, facilitating community-led solutions to a number of the structural problems listed above that, to some degree, have been enhanced by a failure to engage with the protracted, gendered, isolating, fractured experience of refugeehood in Turkey.

Recommendations

- *Recognise the protracted nature of conflict-induced displacement from the MENA:* Humanitarian agencies, NGOs, states and international bodies must cease to consider the events in Turkey a 'crisis', and instead work to target the more long-term and protracted nature of displacement in the country
- *Fill the funding gap:* More funding should be made available to investigate the livelihoods, challenges, living conditions and responses to Syrian refugees in Turkey
- *Recognise the intersectionality inherent in diverse refugee populations:* The vulnerabilities of refugees should be considered in relation to gender, sexuality, ethnicity and faith, with more work done to target the specific needs of those living in urban areas
- *Improve economic opportunities for refugees:* Projects should focus on developing gender-sensitive sustainable livelihoods for refugees in Turkey to limit the likelihood of economic exploitation, insecurity, and exposure to radicalisation.
- *Prioritise inclusivity in humanitarian programming:* The work of local and non-state actors engaging in activities designed to support and protect refugees, particularly women, children, and LGBTQ individuals, should be centralised in humanitarian programming. This can best be done through the application of a gendered lens, and through the mainstreaming of gender-sensitive research/recommendations.
- *Empower refugee communities, CBOs and Syrian organisations:* Capacity building of refugee organisations is very much needed, and easily implementable, in certain hotspots such as the south of Turkey. This should focus on technical training, employability and transition, with substantial considerations given to the intersections of gender, faith, sexuality and ethnicity throughout.
- *Engage the Turkish government through lobbying, advocacy and diplomacy:* More should be done to lobby the Turkish government to enhance access to livelihoods, with support given to non-state and local actors as a priority.
- *Capacitate organisations to engage in and lead effective advocacy strategies:* Community-led advocacy projects should be implemented that seek to raise awareness of exploitation, particularly among women, children and LGBTQ refugees, working with and led by local communities, leaders and officials throughout.
- *Enhance the language skills of refugees in Turkey:* Turkish language learning should be implemented as part of a number of humanitarian projects in order to enable more effective integration into the Turkish economy and society. This should empower refugees, particularly non-Turkish speaking women, who may otherwise be exposed to greater risk of exploitation or manipulation by Turkish employers, officials and other groups.
- *Enhance the legal and medical literacy of refugees:* Legal advice to help women and other refugees know their sexual and reproductive rights, legal rights, employment rights, and political rights should be



CTDC
Centre for Transnational
Development and Collaboration